

Not long ago I had the opportunity to attend my county's commissioners meeting. I had already attended one of these gatherings several years ago but remembered very little of the whole affair. As I made my way into the tall building I was greeted by many smiles and more than one firm hand shakes. I sat down in the front row and waited, I noticed that every single commissioner was present, but not one of them was at their large crescent shaped desk in the front of the room. Instead they were making their way around the entire room greeting and welcoming all who had come. I honestly had not expected this and found it very refreshing compared to what I had imagined. My expectations for my little visit to this meeting was that it would be a very cold and formal interaction between our county's leaders and anyone else who came. Also I assumed that the content of the meeting would be very complicated and lack any type of interesting material.

A few minutes after the designated time for the meeting the commissioners made their way to their table at the front of the room where all five of them sat in a semi-circle facing the rest of the people in the room. The meeting was initiated by the pledge of allegiance and followed by some pleasantries from the head commissioner. Once a quick summary of the agenda was given I was invited to come to the front of the room where I briefly introduced myself and spoke about 4-H and the purpose of my visit that evening. Once I had finished and returned to my seat the meeting continued on its planned route. The first order of business was from the sheriff's department concerning the appropriate use of a grant they had been awarded. After a short discussion it was decided to have separate public hearing to allow those with an opinion to voice it. However, it was obvious that the money would probably be spent on a kit to assist the department in emergency situations with an emphasis on the situations that end in explosions. Immediately I was more intrigued after hearing the first order of business especially since I understood everything that they had discussed.

After the first order of business the meeting continued with all sorts of different matters some were resolved shortly and some took quite a bit of debate between the commissioners and district attorney. Once we had gone through three to four subjects I quickly realized why there is more than one commissioner to a council. They showed each other and everyone else great respect but there were some issues that they were far from seeing eye to eye on. However, it was very nice to see a group of leaders having their own opinion and still maintain a dignified and orderly meeting despite their differences.

Once the meeting had come to an end I was making my way towards the door and I couldn't help thinking about how I had it all wrong. I had assumed it would be just a public formality with a few questions and a few answers. I had also taken the idea for granted that there wouldn't be debate and disagreement. However once again I learned that I had pictured it to be completely opposite from reality. Not only did the commissioners answer questions they did their best to involve everyone. I came away from this experience with a different outlook on my local government. Not only do I have a voice, but the politicians want to hear it. However, I believe the most important thing I learned from this experience was that you don't

have to agree with someone to work successfully with them, you just have to keep a mutual respect for each other.